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CHILDREN OF GOD

AND

WINGED THINGS

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AND

WINGED THINGS

BY

ANNE MOORE

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To

Helen Lohmann

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CHILDREN OF GOD

"Si j'étais Dieu,
j'aurais pitié du coeur des hommes."

MAETERLINCK

I Saw a Little Boy Once

I saw a little boy once
Whom I should like
To see again.

It was years and years ago in Venice,
That I saw him cross
Saint Mark's Square.

He stepped so lightly,
He lifted his foot so high,
It seemed as if, like Pegasus,

He might leave the ground
And float somewhere above me
In the sky.

He is a man now.
I should like to know
What life has done to him.

He was so gay and light-hearted.
I should like to know
That life has not been unkind to him.

A Child

A child standing at a window,
Sleepless,
In the stillness of the night.

Below,
A meadow flooded with moonlight.

On each side
Dark pines whisper somberly,
Their murmur
Mingling with the wavebeat
Of the sea
Against the shore.

In the meadow
A little white calf
Asleep.

The child
Awed with the stillness,
And the vastness,
And the beauty
Half-understood,
Sobbing silently,
Stretches out his hands
In kinship to the calf.

Often the man
Stands lonely in the moonlight.

Then, remembering
The spot of whiteness
That once meant
The comfort of a living presence,
He sees again
And blesses
The little white calf
Asleep.

She Sat at My Feet

She sat at my feet while I talked with her mother.
Now and then she looked at me shyly.
Once she patted my knee.
When I went down the long path she followed me
And at the gate confidingly put her hand in mine.

"Have you a little girl at your house?" she said.
"No. I haven't a little girl."
"Have you a little dog?"
"No. I haven't a dog."
"Or a kittie?" I shook my head.
She was pathetically eager. "Haven't you anything?"
When I did not answer she said,
"I haven't any dog, or any kittie, or anything."

All at once I knew how alone I was.
And I knew she was alone too.
My fingers tightened on hers.
I smiled into the upturned, quivering face.

"I have a book with pictures in it
That I think a little girl would like to look at."
"A book with pictures in it!"
"See, between the trees, there is my house.
I should like to see a little girl sitting on my floor
With my picture book beside her."
"You'd like to see a little girl sit there?
Let me come tomorrow. Oh, let me come."

So we became friends,
The lonely little girl and I.

He Looked at Me

He looked at me
With big, unsmiling eyes,
Impassive and impersonal
As though I were a worm upon the ground.
I moved toward him ingratiatingly
And smiled
As one does at children.

He did not move.
I felt apologetic
As though I had intruded
On his privacy.
He stood so unblinking, imperturbable,
Looking at me with wide-open eyes.

Suddenly,
I felt stripped to my soul.
All my pettinesses,
Futile subterfuges,
Self-deceptions,
Laid bare
By a child's appraising stare.

I Bore Him and I Reared Him

I bore him and I reared him.
He was strong and fair and beautiful.
Fit for work and love.
I had seen to that.
Before him was the joy of living.

Then came the scourge.
They took him from me.
I who had been always at his side
Had to give way to strangers.

Today they brought him back to me.
He had been good and patient
At the hospital, they said.

He must go on being good and patient
To the end of life.
They brought him back to me
Crushed and broken.
My boy I was so proud of!

My boy I am proud of still
Because he is brave and calm
Now that he cannot walk,
And will never walk again;
Because he can face life unafraid.
Though he cannot know as I do
The stretch of years ahead,
And how he will weary for all the things
That he had meant to do.

I am thankful for his spirit,
Thankful that he has the courage
To face his weakness,
The courage that I thought
Would mean so much
To a strong man.

An Oath, a Shriek

An oath, a shriek.
A white-faced driver
Pulling on the reins of a plunging horse.
Under the menacing hoofs
A child unconscious of danger.

The terror-stricken mother
Clasping one child to her breast,
Holding another by the hand,
Stands on the pavement.

The little girl toddles on
One sticky finger in her mouth
A doll dragging at her side.

The mother darts toward her
And roughly shakes her.
"What did you let go my skirt for?
I thought you was right at my side."

The trembling driver continues his way
Muttering and swearing under his breath.
"God, if I hadn't seen her!
The kids walk the streets
Like nothing couldn't hurt 'em.
God, if I hadn't seen her!"

I Watched the Child

I watched the child playing on the flag stones.
She had a ball that bounced.
When she threw it
It struck inside the crack
Where the stones joined.
She caught it and hopped once,
Just over the crack, to a spot
Whence she could throw the ball
Inside the next crack.
She measured the distance with her eye.
She did not miss once down the long street.

I remembered my own progress to school.
I am sure if her ball had missed once
Hitting inside the crack,
Or if she had once failed to catch it on its rebound,
Or once touched her foot to the flag when she hopped,
She would have missed her lesson that day,
She would have lost her place on the honor roll,
And she would have had to give up her seat
At the head of her class.

He was just a little boy when it happened.
The company saved two dollars a week
And he became a cripple for life.

It was a mere matter of business.
Why should you pay a man to do a child's job
When you can get a child to do it?
It was a child's job.
He proved that when his father was ill.
So the foreman looked at it.

It was not the company's business to know
That when the man was ill and could not work
There was no money to buy food;
It was not its business to know
The mother's anxious fear
That another would be taken in her husband's place
And there would be no work, nor chance of earning,
When he should be about again;
Nor the courage of the boy who said,
"Don't worry, mother,
I can do my father's work
And hold his job till he gets well."
And, in his father's stead,
Wheeled the heavy barrow through the long day,
Forcing, with indomitable will and nervous strength,
His body's weakness to the task;

Nor the man's bitter shame
When the foreman told him
The son had done the work so well
They preferred to keep him in the place.

Why should they pay the man six dollars
When they could get the boy for four?

The man could get no work
Though he tried in every way he knew.
The mother went to the oyster sheds
To earn what she could,
While he did her task at home,
And made his weary round
Of daily begging for a job
That daily was refused.
Always at the sheds he stopped
To wheel the barrow up the hill,
And so save the boy,
Until one day the foreman saw him
And, cursing, said he'd have no loitering there.
Then he had to stay away.

Always the boy smiled and said,
"Don't worry, father.
It is good for me to work.
Just feel my muscles.
They are getting big and hard."

One day his straining heart gave out.
He fell. After days of pain
The doctor found his injury serious and told him
He would never walk again.

Then the foreman gave the man back his job
At the boy's wage.
And the company praised him
For saving two dollars a week on the barrow.

The company knew nothing about the child.
But the father knew.
And the mother knew.
And the child lived and suffered.

A Storm Coming

A storm coming,
Clouds scudding,
Trees tossing,
Thunder crashing.

A child,
Dress and hair
Blown by the wind,
Face gleaming white
In the dusk,
Swaying,
Gently at first,
Then madly, rhythmically,
In time to the wind.

"Fifi!"

The child does not hear.
Arms raised on high,
Tossing wildly in the wind,
She whirls
Nearer and nearer the bluff
Until—

"Fifi!"

The mother's arms encircle her roughly.
The startled child stiffens,
Then relaxes limply.

"Don't you hear me, Fifi?"

"I hear the wind, Mama,
The wind calling me.
The wind says dance."
The mother does not know the call of the wind.
"Mama, the beautiful wind—"

"Fifi!"

The child catches her breath,
Shudders slightly,
And says no more.

A Child at a Water Cooler

A child at a water cooler in a crowded car
Trying in vain to pull down the faucet,
Now and again turning toward his mother
Who does not move.

A man hard-featured and collarless
Stops behind the child.
His face softens as he watches
The fruitless efforts of the little fellow.

From his pocket he takes an aluminum drinking cup.
Very quietly he adjusts it.
Then he leans tenderly over the child
And is about to whisper in his ear
That he will help him fill the cup,
When the mother darts forward
And catching the child by the arm
Peremptorily drags him away.

The man's hand drops to his side.
His face grows hard again.
He stands quiet a moment.
Then he fills the cup and drinks slowly.

Somehow he has acquired a dignity
He did not have before.

A Dull Flush Crept Over Her Brow

A dull flush crept over her brow and behind her ears.
A look came into her eyes—It was like an animal
That cannot defend itself when you are hurting it.
It made me uncomfortable.
If she had answered back I would have known what to do.
But she sat still and looked at me.

A little later she asked to go home.
That gave me a chance to bluster.
I said she could not go
Until she had done the Arithmetic lesson.
She was too big a girl to come to school day after day
And go to sleep over her books. She said,
"I reckon I can't stay today," and left the room.

Of course I had to see her folks.
I could not have a girl in school who disobeyed.
That was how I came to find out about her.
I hope I shall always remember the lesson I learned.
Find out first. Talk afterwards if you must.

It was four miles to her home.
She walked it twice a day. I had not troubled before
To find out where she lived nor what the place was like.

Her mother was in bed incurably sick.
She was the oldest of six and just fifteen.
In the morning she was up at some unearthly hour
To fix breakfast for her father and get him off to work.
Then she had to get the other children off to school
And make her mother comfortable before she went herself.
In the afternoon she washed and ironed and cleaned.
No wonder she had no time at home for lessons
And was too sleepy to do much in school.
"Why didn't you tell me how things were?" I asked.
"I reckoned you knew," she said.

I would have known if I had been on my job
As she had been on hers.
And I would have managed to help her.
Anyway I would have found something
Better to do than scold.

Two Lads

Two lads swinging by straps in a crowded car.
One with flushed cheeks and troubled eyes,
The other cold and white
His lips curling to conceal a hurt.
The first pleading,

"I didn't know you was going to take it like that.
I didn't mean it the way you took it.
I thought we was friends.
You said we was friends for always.
Don't look that way.
It makes me feel—
You don't need me.
But I need you.
Oh, what can I say?
I thought you'd understand—
We being friends—"

Dear lad, don't you know how hard it is sometimes
For a friend to understand?
We count on friendship for understanding
And it fails when we need it most.
We're so frail that we look for frailty
And do not give the benefit of the doubt.
Be patient. Someday, perhaps,
Your friend will understand
How the foreman gave an order and you obeyed
Not knowing it would work him harm.
Then things will be as before.

No, not quite.
Things never are quite the same
After a bitter misunderstanding.
Sometimes they are better.
Sometimes—there is a wound
That never heals.

A Little Boy and a Big Boy

A little boy, and a big boy,
One white, the other black,
Working together, playing together,
Fishing, swimming, singing together,
Always singing together,
Their voices rising and falling
In the plaintive chant
Of a negro folksong,
The childish treble sustaining the melody,
The black boy's resonant tenor,
Like the trill of a mocking bird,
Playing around it.

Friends,
Gentle, tender, considerate, understanding,
Both giving, both taking.
The black boy giving devotion and service,
Accepting with pride the gentle
But masterful leadership of the white child,
Who never forgets that service,
To be accepted with honor,
Must be born of love.

Then, one day,
The child's voice silent.
The big boy alone,
Missing his guiding star,
Feeling a want
That never while he lives,
In spite of love of woman

And children born of that love,
Is filled.

Remembering always, with tenderness,
The little white boy
Who found him hungry and fed him,
Fed his body with bread,
His spirit with love,
And made visible a beauty of soul
That, without his friendship,
Would have been forever hidden.

A Black Girl

A black girl walking up and down,
Up and down ceaselessly.
In her arms a baby
Pressed against her breast.
Her low voice crooning.
The child sick unto death
Now and again weakly wailing.

The girl, sorrowing:
"Can't you res', little baby?
Becky's holding you.
Can't you feel her arms about you?
What is it's hurting you?
Becky'd stop it if she could.
There, there, little baby,
Don't you cry.
Becky won't put you down.
She'll hold you.
She knows you want your mammy.
But she ain't here, little baby.
God knows if you was mine,
I wouldn't 'a lef' you today.
But maybe she ain't know
How sick you is.
Maybe—Oh, God!
If somebody'd come."

The child lies stiff in her arms.
Not all her tenderness,
Not all her devotion
Could stay death.

The mother, returning,
Reads in her face what has happened.
Distracted because she did not know
Her child was near to death,
She blames the girl,
The universe, everybody.

The black girl saw the baby suffered,
And felt his need of her,
So she put her arms about him
And kept them there
Till the need passed.

To the grief-stricken mother
She says only,
"I done the bes' I could
To keep him for you.
I done the bes' I could."

A Little Dog

A little dog came to me crying with pain.
He did not know what hurt him, nor why.
He did not know me. But he came
Believing me his friend.
He rubbed against my hand
Crying pitifully.

O little dog,
I would there were healing in my hands.
I would touch you
And take the pain away.

There have been human beings
Who have come in the same way.
Sometimes I have been able to help them.
More often I have failed.
But they understand.

You come as we go to God,
Trusting in his power.
To fail you, little dog,
Is to break faith.
So it grieves me to do no more
Than speak softly to you
And touch you gently.
Does that help you, little dog?

O Grown-up Person

O Grown-up Person
With the wistful eyes
And the changing mouth
That quivers and droops
In the midst of a smile,

O Grown-up Person
With the heart of a child,
Are you afraid of some terrible thing
In the big dark room
Where you stand at the door?

When your lip trembles so,
Are you afraid that a big, black bear
Will come upon you, unaware,
Standing there?

Are you afraid of Life?
Or Death?
O Grown-up Person
With the heart of a child.

The doctor. [*Speaks.*] You're tired, Sister. Please rest.

The sister. [*Speaks.*] She should wake soon.

The doctor. Let me take your place. I should like to be here when she comes back to consciousness.

[*The sister leaves. The doctor sits watching the girl who presently opens her eyes and speaks.*]

She. I didn't know I'd be lying in a bed. I thought—I don't know exactly what I thought, only—You look like any man that's kind and good. I'm glad of that. [*She sighs.*] I'm tired. I thought—Oh, I thought—

He. Child, why did you do it?

She. It doesn't matter, does it?

He. Here, drink this." [*She drinks.*]

She. It tastes just the way I thought things would taste here.

He. Drink it all. It will make you stronger.

She. I thought I would be strong as soon as I got here.

He. I had hard work to save you.

She. Did they want to send me to hell?

He. If I had not been there—

She. They would have tried to?

He. You almost killed yourself.

She. Almost!

He. I brought you here.

She. Almost! I thought—What is this place?

HE. Saint Joseph's Hospital.
SHE. And you! Who are you?
HE. I am Doctor Scott.
SHE. Doctor Scott. I thought—you—If you had been God—you would have had pity.
HE. Why did you do it, child?
SHE. I don't know. Perhaps—because—Were you ever hungry all the time?

What Do They Fear

What do they fear
All these souls
Behind these frightened eyes?

It is when you catch them unaware
That you see it.
The rest of the face shows nothing.
It is schooled to show nothing
That is intimate or personal.

The eyes cannot be schooled.
When one is off one's guard
They show everything.

You can look through them into the soul.
If you look long and deep enough
You see Fear.

What do they fear, all these souls?
Death? Punishment for sin?

Hunger.

They fear they may not have
For themselves, or for those they love,
Things they must have to preserve life.
Primitive things like food and clothing,
Things men fight each other for,
Sometimes die for.

And those who fear not material need?
What of them?

Before them too is hunger,
The eternal menace of hunger.

I Sew Gloves

I sew gloves because there ain't nothing else I can do.
It just keeps me from starving.
Sometimes I think I'd rather starve than sew another pair.
Then I look at him and keep on.
I could easy starve myself
But I can't starve him.

Yet, down in his soul, I'm pretty sure
He feels the same as I do
And keeps up because of me.
It's curious, ain't it, what human beings will do
When they set store by each other?
They go on hiding, or thinking they're hiding,
And you can't let on you know,
When you see as plain as day.
I wonder if he knows how I feel,
The same as I do him,
And thinks he's hiding for my sake
As I do for his. I never thought before.
Maybe—Men ain't as keen as women.
I hope—he don't.

Time was when things was well with us.
But that was before he hurt his back,
When he had his job. I can see it pains him.
But he says he's used to it and don't mind.
He's good and patient about helping me.
God knows what I'd do if he was like some.

He sits by me and turns the fingers
As fast as I can sew 'em.
If he didn't I couldn't do more'n half I do.

Yes, I get all I can do.
Most always the boss gives you a little less
So's he can keep you coming and have you
When the rush comes on.
But I ain't like the woman across the street.
She calls him the good, kind boss when he gives
her work.
He ain't giving it to her, and he ain't giving it to
me
Because he's good and kind. He gives it to me
Because he knows I'm the best hand he's got.
He knows which side his bread is buttered on
And he keeps the buttered side to himself.
It's the other side I get.

He don't fool me none since the day
He done me out of what was rightful mine.
I told him straight what he was,
But I didn't get my pay.
It was a rush order he gave me,
Saturday noon ten dozen pair.
He wanted 'em first thing Monday morning.
The best anyone can do is three dozen pair a day.
But I worked straight through,
Just slept an hour or two Saturday and Sunday
nights
And my man sat by me helping.
I got 'em to him when I said I would.

He said he'd pay me straight the price,
That was two dollars,
And he'd give me extra fifty cents
If I got 'em through on time.
Two fifty would just buy the shoes I needed.
When I finished I was too dead beat
To take 'em back myself and John took 'em.
He looked 'em over one by one
And couldn't find no fault.
Then he turned to his money box
And handed John one dollar and eighty cents.
John said I was expecting more,
That I'd told him to bring back two dollars and a half.
He laughed and said, "Do you think I'm a fool?
Two dollars and fifty cents for less than two day's work?
If she can do 'em fast as that I'm paying too much.
I'll cut the price. One eighty is all she gets."
And me sitting there seeing nothing but gloves
Wherever I looked.

Was you ever like that?
It was worse that time than it had ever been.
It sort of started me off.
Now it's most always like that.
At the end of the day I just see gloves.
That tree there that's spreading out its bare branches.
There are five of 'em, five fingers. Do you see the thumb?

That short thick branch that's folded in across
the trunk?
The trunk's the hand.
Look at that mud puddle, how the water's run.
It's like a mit. Just the thumb is separate from
the rest.

I didn't get my shoes, and my foot was on the
ground.
I had to go on for another week tying 'em on.
Since then I ain't worked nights later than twelve
o'clock.
I can just make what we've got to have
If I start at eight and work straight through till
midnight.
That little patch of road and that tree
Is all I see of out of doors.
John goes back and forth for me.
I can't take the time.

God, I wonder how long it's going to last.

It Came as a Storm

It came as a storm does.
A few sharp, rattling taps,
Then more and more,
Slowly at first,
Then faster and faster,
Louder and louder,
Thousands upon thousands,
Until separate sounds
Are lost in a roar
Ominous, menacing, fearful.

I sit up in bed
Not knowing what catastrophe
May be upon me.

The clock strikes six.
I know what it is.

The feet of the workers
Upon the pavement
Moving towards the mills,
Their day begun.

I think of yesterday,
The day before, all the days
When I have heard the feet passing.

And I wonder
When workers will awake,
When they will learn

That life means more than work,
When they will demand
Time to live.

In that day
I shall not hear the feet
Passing to the mills at six o'clock.
The deluge will be upon us.

She is Only Twenty-three

She is only twenty-three.
And she has been through all
A woman can go through
And live.

She has not been
What the neighbors call good.
They say she suffers for her sins.
Yet she still takes pleasure
In things as simple
As the color of the buttons that she sews.
I wonder if she was so very bad.

I saw her when she was eighteen,
Untouched by life, eager, beautiful.
And again when she came home for a visit.
I did not know then
What the look in her eyes meant.
I only knew something very terrible
Had happened to her.
Again I saw her when she came home for good.
She was a wreck then,
Cast off by the man she had married
Because she was no longer able
To earn money for him
In the fashion that he willed.

All day she sits carding buttons.
She cannot stand nor walk alone.
At night her father lifts her to her bed
And in the morning to her chair again.

Yet her eyes still have laughter in them
And in her centers family life and love.

I went to see her yesterday.
I like to hear the clever things she says
And watch her rapidly moving fingers
As she sews the buttons to their cards.

You who carelessly break the thread
That fastens the buttons
Exclaiming with impatience if it catches,
Do you know what it means
To sew buttons on a card
At two cents a gross?
One's fingers must move very fast
To make anything in a day.

"Look," she said,
Holding a card for me to see,
"Aren't they pretty?"

The buttons that pleased her
Were commonplace enough,
A blue center rimmed about with black.

"When mother took me out yesterday
We passed a man with buttons on his coat
Like these. Mother, I said,
Do you think they'll ever give me
Such pretty buttons to sew?

Today they gave them to me.
Think of that."

From the Window

From the window of the car I see
A row of lamp posts
Stretching one behind the other,
The last four rising
Where the hill begins,
Each beautiful in its symmetry
Suited to the needs of the street
That it lights.

Facing me a row of human beings
Gnarled and bent,
Moulded into unlovely shapes
By hard and relentless contacts,
Hands and feet once beautifully formed
Twisted and misshapen,
Minds and souls once attuned to life
Maimed and shrunken,
Unfitted forever
For the joy of living.

I Have a Little Place in the Country

I have a little place in the country.
It is very beautiful.
It shall be more beautiful because I have lived there.
The house, half hidden in the trees, is long and low
With broad, hospitable piazzas.
There is a sloping hillside,
At its foot, a tiny brook with lilies growing on its banks.
There are birds and wild flowers and other lovely things.
Enhancing, preserving, loving its beauty,
I live there all alone.

My neighbor across the way has a house and garden.
She is too busy growing peas and beans and useful things
To think of beauty.
There is always someone with her,
A work-worn mother with an ailing baby,
A child recovering from fever.
Last summer she had a waif from Hell's Kitchen.
She made a human being of him.
Now she has a child from the East Side with tuberculosis.
The house is ramshackle.
The roof leaks and the barn needs paint.
Piles of unsightly boards lie outside the door.

Weeds are growing high in the path.
Often the babies cry.

Dear Lord, it makes me sick at heart.
I mean my way of living, not hers.

I Have Been Very Ill

I have been very ill.
Now I must reckon the cost.
The bills are all here,
The doctor, the hospital, the nurse,
And little extra things.
One hundred and fifty dollars they come to.
Fifty dollars more than I have.
That means I must go on
As I've been doing.

I wonder if I can go on.
I've worked so hard,
Night as well as day,
To get a little ahead.
I was looking forward to a rest.

I won my goal,
One hundred dollars in the bank
Against the rainy day.
There's my book that shows,
My book I was so proud of adding to
Each week.

I thought
When I have one hundred dollars
I can stop the extra work.
But I can't stop.
I've to pay.
I must go on and on as I did
Before the pain racked me.

The pain's gone.
I'm glad it's gone.
But there's the weakness.
I must reckon with that.
That will keep me back
From earning so much.

One hundred and fifty dollars!
Oh, my God!

If I had not worked so hard,
If I had not strained so
To put aside that hundred dollars,
Perhaps I would not have had the pain.
That's the worst,
To think that it was all wasted,
All those hours and hours of work
When I made myself sit there
Just because I was afraid,
Just because I thought I would feel safer
To have something if I should fall ill.

My friends told me I was looking tired
And ought to take care of myself.
They didn't understand when I said I must go on.
I thought I could hold out two weeks longer.
Now I must pay.

I wonder what it was put it in my head to do it.
Oh, yes. I remember.
The lady told me I should save.
I wonder how one saves on what I get each week.

Somehow she got me afraid,
Afraid I might get ill
And nothing to fall back on.
So I took to working after hours.
Now I must go on.
I can't stop.
I must earn that fifty dollars.
I spent two years putting aside a hundred.
That means I must go on one more year.
But I can't work so fast, nor so long now.
How long will it take?
How long, I wonder.
I feel like—

I know what I feel like.
That frog.
You remember the frog?
He used to worry me somehow.
He used always to come to me in the Arithmetic class.
If a frog is in a well one hundred feet deep,
And if he climbs up three feet every day,
And slips back two feet every night,
How long will it take him to get out of the well?

I never could tell because I was always wondering
Suppose he didn't keep it up, suppose—
Suppose one night he lost his hold
And slipped back into the water
And went down a hole,
And the hole was fifty feet deep.
How long would it take him to get out then?

Do you suppose he could climb as fast as he did before?
Suppose—suppose—
Suppose the next time he gets nearly out he falls again—
When—when—do you suppose—
Oh, my God!
When will the end come?

I Never Was Very Smart

I never was very smart.
My father told me I wasn't smart
And I musn't ever do anything important by myself.
But somehow—
I don't know how it happened.
It seemed all right.
But he's got the field,
And I haven't anything.
He talked fair
And I thought he was telling me true.
But somehow it don't seem natural
For me not to have that field.
It was my father's,
And his father's before mine.
But yesterday he came and said it was his.
He ordered me off.
And when I said I didn't want to go
He said he'd have me arrested for trespassing
And I'd be sent to jail.
Somehow it don't seem just right.
Of course I know the horse was his.
But it seems like
There ought to be some other way to pay him
Besides his taking my field.
I needed a horse to till the field with.
He said he had one he wasn't using.
He said I could take it
And pay him a hundred dollars when the crop sold,
All I had to do was to put my name to the paper

And it would be all right.
Of course he didn't know the horse was going to die.
But it died that night.
He came the next day
And said the horse dying made everything different
And I would have to pay the money right off.
I told him I didn't have it.
He said it didn't make any difference,
And he spoke real fair.
He said I could put my name to another paper,
A deed, he called it,
And it would be all right.
I did it and I thought he was real kind.
Then the next day he came
And said the field was his,
That that was what the paper said,
And I couldn't take it back
Because he had sent it to the courthouse.
Somehow it don't seem just right for him to take the field
And the horse sick so it died.
But I don't understand very well.
He spoke so fair.
I'm not very smart.
I wouldn't have done it to him.

I Saw His Face

I saw his face when he came down the mountain.
It frightened me. It was so white and hurt.
I walked with him a while thinking to help him.
But when he could trust himself to tell me
What had happened I knew it was beyond me.

He had been saving for a long time
To buy a little piece of land.
He had found it one day
When he was roaming over the mountain
And it had taken his fancy.
He was always a dreamer.
He couldn't plough it,
Nor raise anything on it,
Nor live there.
He just wanted to keep it always the way it was
So he could go to it and look out from it.

He had gone up with the money in his hand.
The folks that lived there were glad of a chance
to sell.
They wanted to get away and they had told him
they would go
Whenever he could pay the price.
It was what they did that broke his heart,
What they did just for a sort of present
Over and above what he was paying for.

When he was telling me about the place
His face was beautiful.

It was way up on the mountainside.
If you lifted your eyes
You could look off across the hills
To the end of the world.
If you looked down you could see
A little lake that reflected
The hills and the trees on its shore.
Just at the top of the rise
Were two tall pine trees.
He set store by those trees.
When he first came to the place
He stopped just behind them
And when he looked up he said
It was like seeing Kingdom Come
Through God's picture frame.

That day when he got to the top of the rise
He said it was as if something had happened to his eyes.
He didn't know what it was at first.
Then the man, smiling happy-like, came toward him and said,
"I got 'em down today.
I been meaning to do it this long time
But I ain't got around to it before.
It didn't seem just right to leave 'em
When you was coming.
They was so in the way."

Then he knew the trees were gone.
And he turned and came down the mountain.

I tried to say the right thing to him,
But no words would come.
It didn't matter. He had forgotten me.

He stood there white and still,
His big eyes seeing nothing but his trees,
His lips just moving so I could hardly hear.
Over and over he was saying,
"My trees are gone,
My beautiful trees.
They cut my trees."

All at once he threw back his head.
And, in his impotence,
He arraigned God.

"Why did you make it beautiful,
And not give them eyes to see?
Why did you give them power to destroy,
And not give them eyes to see?"

The Subway at Six O'clock

The subway at six o'clock on a warm afternoon.
Electric fans, whirring accompaniment to grinding wheels,
Stir air that reeks with varied odors.

A man hides behind a newspaper
Trying to seem unconscious
That he is occupying two seats
While women are standing.

A woman yields her seat
To another woman carrying a baby
And gets her toes stepped on
For her pains.

Four girls in a row vacuously chew gum,
Each in a special rhythm
Suited to the lubrication
Of an embryonic brain.

A girl absorbed in a thriller enters.
Too short to reach the hard, white handle,
She braces herself against a man
Forgetful of the feather on her hat
That sticks in his eyes and tickles his nose
When the car lurches.

The man smiles tolerantly at her oblivion,
And, wishing he could care as much about

A yellow haired princess and a lover's peril,
Holds firm.

His smiling courtesy amuses the rest of us
And makes tolerable an otherwise
Tedious and harassing journey.

I Saw It One Day

I saw it one day last spring in an Atlantic Port.
I can not forget it.
From the deck of a slowly moving ferry boat,
In the quiet of Sunday afternoon
When the busy-ness of men is for the most part laid aside,
I watched idly.
The docks were full of ships
Ready for their perilous journey overseas.
One floated lightly on the water like a gigantic bird
With strange markings on its back and sides
Resting from flight.
Another reared its head proudly
As though its brilliant color patches
Set it in a class apart.
Yet another, rainbow-hued, strained at its moorings,
As though it knew it would reach its goal
And pass unobserved at dawn
In the irridescent Mediterranean.
Then came one the like of which I had not seen before.
A heavy line of brown followed the outline of a dull grey hull.
Above this, a thin line of white,
Above, another line of brown,
Then grey, dull grey.
I wondered how this Camouflage could serve.
Then, my vision sharpened, I saw the white line

Was made of human faces;
The lines of brown, of soldier khaki.
The ship was waiting for the dark to come.
The men were standing in the stinging cold
Motionless and silent,
Through the long hours looking upon home
As a man looks for the last time upon the face of his beloved.
As though standing so would keep the veil from falling
And hold before their vision that most dear thing
That each one wishes to keep until the end.
I saw it and I can not forget it.
The faces of men about to sail for battle
Turned toward home.

I've been a helpmate to him.
I've scrimped and saved.
And now, I reckon I'm done.
I ain't blaming him. It ain't that.
He's done his best.
But somehow we ain't had no luck.

I reckon I'll go on helping him same as before,
Only I'm going to spend and spend.
I'm going to get some comfort out of life before I die.
I'm going to begin
Just as soon as I've a hundred dollars ahead
Against the children's being sick.

Maybe you think I'm foolish.
I'm tired, dog-tired.
I've worked just like a horse day in and day out.
And what have I got to show for it?
Nothing, just nothing.
Not any more than if I had taken my ease.
Only if I had, and things had gone wrong,
He'd have been sore, and he'd have blamed me.
He wouldn't have known they'd have been that way anyway,
Any more than I knew before we began.

Twice now it's happened.
I got ahead once eight hundred dollars
Just by saving and managing,
And once a thousand dollars.

Twice it's got eat up,
Us trying to get ahead.

I was up before it was light
Getting his breakfast and the men's and redding
the house,
Then out in the fields same as the horses
Ploughing and hoeing.
Then in, getting his dinner and the men's,
Then out hoeing, and ploughing and raking,
I was going to say like the horses.
But it wa'n't like the horses.
They have their rest to keep 'em fit.
It was like a woman that ain't got time to rest.
After the horses stopped
I got supper for him and the men.
When the men were in bed asleep
I was redding and making the children's clothes
And doing the washing.

After all, the crops failed.
And what we had didn't bring nothing.
Thirty cents a hundred they paid us for corn.
The people that ate it paid just ten times that for
it.
Somebody got the money. I don't know who.
We couldn't pay the mortgage.
And they took the farm.
We was just where we was before.

It ain't that I blame him.
He worked and done his best.

And it was hard on him,
Him counting so on making out.
Only I'm tired, dog-tired.
And it happened twice.

I'm going to take some comfort now.
He's got a job
And we're going to use the money coming in.
I'm going to begin
As soon as I've a hundred by
Against the children's being sick.
I'll begin then
And I'll spend and spend.

They Said Sharp, Cruel Things

They said sharp, cruel things about me.
They made evil prophecies.
My eyes danced.
My laugh rang out.

They could not bear to see a woman
Take her life in her own hands
And be happy.

The world is so full of unhappiness,
It needs joy so much,
Why should they try to kill happiness?

They could not kill mine!
I took what love offered.
I am happy for all time.

No matter what comes
My heart will sing.
And I hold my head high.

I am quite sure Mrs. Shultz loved the girl.
I am quite sure she meant to be kind.
She said to me,

"I'm glad she's coming here
So I can take care of her.
She's Richard's niece, you know.
I'd do anything for anybody
That belongs to Richard.
The doctor says it's the Tuber-closis she's got.
I know about that.
It's in Richard's family.
I've seen three of his sisters die of it.
The doctor says she's got a chance up here
Where the air is good
And she can get good food.
I'm going to give her plenty of eggs
And milk, and good fresh butter.
I'll do the best I can for her
Just as I did for Richard's sisters."

After a time I saw Mrs. Shultz again.
She did not look happy.
I asked if Ettie were better.
She said,

"She's gone back to the city
Where there ain't a living chance for her.
I did my best.
But I couldn't keep her from going.

She said she was going to die
And she wanted to die in the city
Where her father is
And her brothers and sisters.
It's enough to kill her
Sleeping the way she does
Out on the fire escape
In the foul, night air.
Here she had a nice, soft bed,
And a room all to herself.

"You wouldn't believe
How headstrong she was.
Once she got the notion to go
Nothing could keep her.
It was just so about the window
Once she made up her mind
To have it open.

"I did my duty by her, I know that.
It wasn't easy either.

"I didn't go to sleep a single night
Until I was sure about her window.
I told her she must keep it shut.
She could get all the air she needed in the daytime.
Night air is bad for the Tuber-closis.
I found that out when I was nursing Richard's
sisters.
But would you believe it?
After I had tucked her in and had gone to bed
She'd get up and open it, softly,

Just an inch at a time
So I shouldn't hear.
But I did, and I went again and shut it.
At last, when I found I couldn't trust her,
I went with a hammer
And I nailed it shut.
She said it sounded like I was nailing her coffin.
It shouldn't be said I neglected Richard's niece
And didn't treat her like one of my own.

"I did my best. I know that.
But she didn't get better.
She seemed to pine for something.
She said she was disappointed.
I could see she had expected
To get better right off up here.
Well, there wasn't any keeping her.
So Richard took her to the station last week.

"Today I got a letter.
It says there isn't any hope.
I just can't bear to think that Ettie—

"Well, I did my duty."

Friday, Saturday, Sunday

Friday, Saturday, Sunday,
Three whole days of freedom
From the crashing noise
And racking contacts
Of the city.

I lift my eyes to the long, low-lying hills,
The smell of warm, moist earth comes to me.
I feel wind cool on my cheek
And warm sun.
I remember they call this day
Good Friday.

I shut my eyes.
I see the church
With its kneeling throng
And its purple altar cloths.
I hear the sad, Gregorian music.
I wonder why they call this Friday good.

Yet,
Because so many years ago
Men killed the God-man,
I am free today
To wander through the fields
Praising God in my own way.

Twice

Twice I took my life into my own hands,
Once for Art.
Once for Love.
Then again twice.

Four times God said,
"Your life is mine.
You shall do with it
What I decree."

Music called me.
I turned my back upon my appointed task
To follow the call.
God took my voice.

Then my Love came.
I left all
To be with him.
God took my Love.

Twice I said,
"If I may not live
The life I wish,
I will not live."

Even when I sought to die
God interfered.
Yet men say
That we are free.

They Said it Could Not Last

They said it could not last.
Deep in my heart I knew they were right.
It was too perfect to last.

Today I am facing it.
When I saw him look at her this morning
I knew it was the end.

I called him to me.
I took his hands in mine
And smiled into his eyes.

"She loves you," I said. "Go to her."
I could do it because I love him so,
Because the happiness he has given me has been
so great.

I did not tell him that next my heart
I bore his crowning gift to me.
I could not hold him by such means.

Some day my son will understand.
He will be glad his mother made his father happy
In the only way she could.

So they've got a woman, have they, at the crossing, flagging trains?
And she's been there for a week, has she, every day
From sun-up to sun-down without going home to rest
Even when it drizzled rain?
And they're telling her they think she's fine
To stick so on the job, are they?

Well, I don't grudge her nothing, only—
They're doing it so she'll want to stay.
I know that much.
They want to keep her on the job
Now the men are going to war.
That's what they want.

It all depends on what they want,
What they tell you when you work for 'em,
Especially when you're a woman and can't help yourself.
It ain't how you do the work. That ain't what counts.
It's what they want.
What did they tell me when I flagged the trains?
Yes. I flagged trains for 'em one whole year.
What did they tell me when they found it out?
That I'd done it well?
They told me I'd no right to the job
And would have to go.

I'd like to know who had a better right
When I'd done it a whole year and no fault found.

It was night and cold when I began.
It was my man's job,
All that stood between us and this poor-farm
Where I am at last.
One day he came home sick.
All day I tended him hoping he'd get better,
But the pain racked him when he tried to move,
And when it came on night he fretted
For fear the trains would come to harm
Or somebody would get hurt.
He'd been always faithful
And they depended on his being there.
I told him not to worry. I would take his place.

I put his clothes on, took his lantern
And went down the hill to the place where the tracks cross.
I stayed the night through.
The next night I went again and the next.
He grew easier in his mind, knowing the work was done
And the pay would come as usual.
Daytimes I tended him and the track at night
From sun-down to sun-up for a year.
I came to love the track
And the stars that shine so clear.
At last he died.

All I wanted then was to stay on
In the old house where we'd lived so long

And flag the trains as I'd been doing.
But they found out he was dead.
They came and said they'd put some one in his
place.
I told them how I'd flagged the trains
All the while that he was sick
And begged to stay.
A cousin of an engineer wanted a job.
They told me tending track was man's work.
A woman couldn't do it.
Couldn't do what I'd been doing without fault for
a year.
They turned me off.
They didn't want a woman on the job—then.
That's why I'm here, at the poor-farm,
Why I know.

I'm Seventy-eight

I'm seventy-eight
But I can hold my own, I guess,
With the best.
I've done a day's work today.
I got my breakfast and my dinner,
I filed my kitchen and my room.
You can't find a speck of dust so big if you looked.
I hoed three rows, long rows they was, and planted beans.
Then I sewed my waist where it was ripped, washed myself,
And dressed and made three pastoral calls.
Then I came up here. That's a good mile and a half I guess.
Now I'm going back.
I'll get my supper and go straight to bed, I think.
I've earned my rest tonight.

But goodness me! That ain't nothing to what I used to do.
I ain't never been one to hold my hands.
I was eighteen when he married me
And brought me to the farm.
I did my part for fifty years.
I wasn't never one to have a girl around.
I used to laugh and tell him that when I married him

It was the same as marrying three,
What with him, and his uncle that lived with us,
And the hired man.
I was broke in young, I guess.
That's why I'm what I am, at seventy-eight.

She Was Old

She was old when I knew her, and she looked at
life
From the vantage point of the years she had lived.
We told her things we told no other.
Always she gave us help and always we wondered
At her sympathy and her tolerance.

One day I understood.
I brought for comfort one
Whom bitter tongues had made to suffer.
My friend held out her hand.

"Were you happy, my dear?
Then don't regret.
You were wise to take the gift life offered."

Then, seeing wonder in our eyes, she said,
"It is because I have not had
That I see so clearly what it means
That you have had.
Once love came to me.
I was afraid.
That is my regret.
I was not brave enough
To take it when it came."

I Do Not Feel Old

I do not feel old.
I know I am not as straight as I was,
And my hand trembles a little,
Not very much, just a little,
When at table I try to pass
A glass of water
Or a cup of coffee.
I can't walk so far,
Nor so fast, as I did.
And they say my hair is white.
I suppose it is.
I hadn't noticed, I've been so busy.

But does it matter?
My work's as good as it was.
I know my work's as good.

They say I'm old.
Maybe I am.
But I'm just learning
What things mean.
I've just reached the place
I've been aiming for.

I don't hear quite as well as I did.
But my work—
I love my work.

God, you won't let them take it from me!

I'm just learning
What it means.

Spring Has Come

Spring has come.
I know because today
Old Andy came in
With his hands full of railway guides.

It's his way.
When the first warm days come
His blood stirs.
I can tell by the way
He walks to the window and looks out.

Yesterday he stood there for a long time,
His poor, frayed coat pressed against the glass,
His arms resting on the lowered sash,
Oblivious of everything
Except a tree-top far below,
And a twittering bird.

Today he brought the guides.
He sat for a long time
Turning over the pages
And looking at the pictures.
Then he said,
"They get these things up nicely, don't they?
Look at that.
That would be a good place to spend the summer."
He held out a woodcut of a log hut in the Adirondacks.

"Fine, Andy," I said.
"When do you expect to go?"
"Oh,—I don't really mean to go, sir.
I never leave the city.
There's the sick wife,
And—" His voice trailed off.

For a moment he seemed old.
Then his eyes brightened
As a child's
When he sees roseate things.
"I went once when I was a boy.
I spent a whole summer in a place like that.
I just get these things, sir.
I like to put a picture up where I can see it
And think, it takes only so long to get there,
And think—"

He opened his ledger.
The rest was swallowed up
In his rapid count,
"2, 5, 7, 29, 81—"

WINGED THINGS

"Si mes Vers avaient des Ailes."

VICTOR HUGO

In the Blue Black of the Night

In the blue black of the night
I saw a pine tree.
In its arms rested a star.

As I looked, the star stirred
And moved from its resting place
Until it hung far above the tree.

The tree stood calm and straight
With its comforting arms stretched out

Waiting for the star to come again,
As it would, the next night and the next.

Something So Nice

Something so nice happened today.
A little bird
Came to visit me.

He was a little bird
Who likes to sit
On the tips of things.

He sat on the topmost tip
Of my little cedar tree
And he sang to me.

He sang so loud
And his song was so sweet
That I came to see.

There he was against the sky
Singing his heart out
To the world and me.

He was blue, blue, blue.
Just below was larkspur
Blue, blue, blue.

There was a tiny, white cloud
In a sky
Of blue.

A soft, soft wind
Swayed the tip of the tree.
There, in the golden morning light,

Careless and gay and free,
A little bird
Gave of his joy to me.

I Laughed When the Bird Sang

I laughed when the bird sang.
Oh, my dear!

For he sang the song
My heart was singing.
I love you, dear.

You heard and smiled.
Oh, my dear!

So I laughed when the bird sang
And you heard my heart singing.
I love you, dear.

Little Yellow Bird

Little yellow bird,
Did you come today
Because it was grey and cold?

Or did you feel
I was sad, little bird,
And in need of your glint of gold?

The sun came out
When you flashed by.
It touched your breast

And the golden-rod
Where you stopped to rest.
And it shone in my heart, little bird.

It shines there more brightly,
O Sunshine bird,
Than it does in the sky above;

Or on your breast,
Or the golden-rod
Where you stopped to rest.

The sun in my heart,
Little bird,
Is love.

My Joy Bird

My Joy bird! My Tanager!

With the glint of the sun
On your wings and throat!

And your vivid delight
In the fresh, young day,

And the cool, still leaves
And the rain-washed air!

You come with your eager song
And your flaming head and breast

To sear me, O Love bird,
And give me rest.

I Never Heard That Bird Before

I never heard that bird before.
I wonder why.
He comes every year in spring
To sing.

I never felt the wind so soft
Or saw new leaves grey-green
In spring.
I wonder why.

I did not know that
Maple keys are red
And young shoots,
As they are in fall.

They came with you,
O love,
This spring.
Is that why?

The world is full of sorrow.
Life is full of pain.
We are blind to beauty.
We are prone to blame.

We are looking in our blindness
Through the grey mist of self,
And all things seem grey.

You come
With your clear vision,
Your gift of seeing beauty,
Your forgetfulness of self.

You smile.
The grey mist lifts.
The sun shines clear.
Joy, beauty, love,
Seem near.

You listen as you smile?
Now I hear.
Tell me

Was it, merely, that you heard
The clear, sweet note
Of a singing bird?

Why Do I Love You

Why do I love you?
I love you, my dear,
For so many things,
And in so many ways,
That when I try
To tell you
What you mean to me
And why,
Only trifles light as air
Frame themselves in words,
My dear.

You smile at this.
You sigh at that.
So your eye-lash sweeps your cheek.
So your color comes and goes.
So—Oh, my dear, in you I see
A beauty wonderful,
A beauty rare,
That your smile
Or your sigh
Just gives hint of,
My dear.

It's your beautiful soul
That I love.
I can not tell you why.
I can only thank God
That he brought me near

To see it
And feel it
And love you
My dear.

Always

Always, my dear, I like you
But

When the song of a bird,
Or the gift of a flower,
Puts light in your eyes;

When the shape of a cloud,
Or sunlight through leaves,

The soft feel of moss,
Or grey trunks of trees,
Brings a smile to your lips;

When the smell of moist earth,
Or wind through the grain,
Turns you to me in friendship;

Then,
I like you most, my dear.

My Garden

My garden is fair today.
Yesterday it was choked with weeds.

Today I knelt, and thrust my fingers
Into the warm, brown, friable earth.
I pulled root, stock and branch.

My flowers spread out their leaves
And preened themselves.

As I knelt, sun came
And warmed me.
Wind swept clear my brain.

All at once I was aware
That from another garden fair
I tore away weeds not pulled with hands
And in their stead
A flower crept, and spread
Like the blue flame of violets.

As the pile of tansey
Grew at my feet
My heart grew light,
The air grew sweet.

Into the garden
Where roses blow
Came the sun.
Into that other garden

Which is my heart
Came love.

Out of my heart confessed
I swept envies and hatreds
And jealousies
And thoughts of self.

Where these are
Love cannot rest.

The Years Pass

The years pass, and the months, and the days.
Each one I cling to,
For each has a beauty of its own
That I may not see again.

Yesterday the sun lay upon that hill-top
A red ball of fire. As it sank,
Through the golden air a bird
Winged his upward way singing.

The day before
A white cloud with the sun upon it
Rested on the top of that pine tree.
All the sky was blue about it.

Today I found a gentian,
Its heart a bit of the sky's own blue,
Floating above the marsh,
Shy, fragile, delicately fringed.

Tomorrow! What will tomorrow bring?
My heart leaps and is still.
Perhaps for me tomorrow may not come.
Or coming, vision may be dulled.

Perhaps I may not see again
Larkspur, flame-colored hills,
The tracery of bare branches,
Shadblow, or apple trees in bud.

Or seeing,
May feel only cold,
Or heat, or biting wind.
So I pray,

Spare me, O Lord, the full measure of each year
That may be mine of vivid feeling,
But take me quickly, God,
When beauty no longer moves me.

I Do Not Know

I do not know if in that life
That may be mine beyond the grave,
I shall feel beauty
And love and peace and joy
In the same way that I do here.

But this I know.
Yesterday I faced the sea.
On one side were quiet hills half hidden
In the haze of forest fires burning far away.
The sun, a glowing ball, hung far above them
Through the smoke cloud shifting red and coppery.
Across the restless water a path blood red
Led up to the irridescent hills.
All was quiet save the sea
And the sea cried to me.

The cry of the sea
Was the cry of my soul.
For beyond the blood red path,
Beyond the sea and the irridescent hills,
Was a beauty too vast
For my finite eyes to see.
And deep within me was a hurt
That beauty should be measureless
And I so impotent that I grasp
But its semblance, not itself.

If it is true, O Lord,
That here my eyes see as through a veil
And my soul as through a glass darkly,
If when I have passed the gates of death
I shall have quickened power
And shall see more deeply
And feel more keenly,
Do not keep me waiting.
Let death come quickly.

It is a Beautiful World

It is a beautiful world, O Lord,
And this is a beautiful day.
Quicken my soul to its depths
That I may feel
The beauty my eyes see.

Winds of God

Winds of God, blow gently on me.
O Sun, warm me.

Your caress is soft,
And, like the touch of my Beloved,
Brings close the heart of beauty.

My flesh vibrates. My spirit sings.
Today, spirit and flesh
Form one harmonious whole.

I am alive.
I am akin to all living things.

The trees, the sky, the floating clouds,
The great, grey rocks, the blades of grass,
Are part of me, and I am part of them.

O Wind and Sun, you are my brothers,
You make me feel my nearness
To all things great and beautiful.

You touch my every sense.
You heal the hurt of apathy.

My son came to me when I was alone
And put his arms about me and held me close.
It was an unwonted thing for him to do.
We had not been very good friends, my son and I.
But he was going to the Front
And the danger softened him,
So he came to be a little tender with me
Before he went.

As he sat so close to me,
And I so happy to have him there,
A strange thing happened.
His face changed.
He took on the form and feature
Of one whom I had loved in years gone by,
A boy no older than himself,
Whom lately I had seen an old man, ill and broken.
Now there was no hint of age or illness.
He was my fair young lover.
I a girl by two years younger.

As he sat there close to me,
My head against his shoulder,
As so often we had sat in other days,
I knew that he was dead.

I am glad he came to me in the old form that I
loved,
Glad it was through my son he came.
Did he mean to tell me, do you think,

That he had loved me all these years?
That through everything he'd kept faith and understood?
Did he mean to say
"For love of you I'll stay near your son to guard him.
Trust me as I have always trusted you."
It would be like him so to comfort me.

After a Year

After a year they meet.
She speaks.

"Doctors say no hope. Can not live till morning."
That was the cable.

Till morning!

How long was left me?
An hour—two—to battle for you?
I did not know.

"He's mine!" I said. "I will not let him go."

I put myself beyond the reach of call
And threw myself upon my bed.

I did not pray.
If anybody saved you, it should be I,
Not some unknown God.

Motionless I lay, hands clenched,
Staring through wide, unseeing eyes
Into the void.

Then—
I felt my soul traverse the sea
And all the land between.

I came into your darkened room,
I saw your still form lying there,
Your thin, white face.

I cried, "I love you. Live for me."
You stirred. I thought,
If I could only make you hear!

My body stiffened where it lay. You would hear
If there is anything in human will.
And, hearing, you would fight to live.

Or, failing strength,
You'd know what I'd kept from you
Through the years,—

Because of her who called you hers
While ever hurting love,—
And you would have a moment's joy.

Straight into your eyes I looked and said,
"I love you. Live for me."
You turned your head as though you sought to hear.

I knew that I must make you feel my need.
"Live for me," I begged. "I need you.
Live for me. I need you."

In face of death, we two, alone, in all the world.
"I love you. Live for me.
Live for me. I love you."

Through the day and through the night,
Sometimes my lips spoke, sometimes my heart alone,
"I love you. I love you. I love you."

Then—you heard!
You smiled and whispered,
"Child, O child."

A light broke in my heart.
I did not need the second cable.
"Out of danger. Crisis past." I slept.

When she is silent
He speaks.

I was so tired.
It was a relief to know that from the stupor
I would go quite quietly and gently out.
They thought me too far gone to understand.
But I heard the doctor say,
"If he does not make some effort he can not live."

I did not let an eyelash quiver.
To lie there peacefully and flicker out
Was what I wanted above all things.
Everything was finished.
I had given all I had to give.
Some one would do the Nation's work.
I would rest for all eternity.
Rest—for all eternity.

Then—
Something came into my mind that troubled me.
It made my head twist from side to side
So that I could not rest.
There was something I must do.

I was so tired.
There was nothing—
Yes, one thing.
What was it?
I could not lie still.
What was it?

Someone was trying to tell me.
If I could stop turning and twisting
I could hear.
I wanted so to hear,
To get it done,
To rest.

Then—
Your voice!
"I love you. Live for me. I need you."
I heard you though you were beyond the sea.

They told me afterwards that I smiled,
And said, "Child, O Child."
I know only this.
I lived for you. I lived for you.

Now that you are near me, O my Love,
Take my hand and say it
As you said it then,
"I love you. I love you."
To know is rest.

Her Apple Tree

Her apple tree is white with bloom.
No petal yet has fallen
Though the other trees are bare.
It waits for her to come.

Last year she came in budding time,
And, from her window,
Saw the change from pink to white,
And watched a blue bird, breast aglow,
Nest-building in the branches.

Now, no friendly face looks out.
Her window is shuttered fast.
Her house, bereft of soul,
Stands lonely.

The tree has done its best.
Each day new buds have come
And opened white and stayed,
As though she yet might come to see.

I stand beneath its fragrant loveliness
And think of her.

The sun goes.
Grayness fills the air.
The tree shivers in the rising wind.

Petals fall upon my hair and face
And make a carpet at my feet.

Did some one sigh?
Is some one other than myself grieving
To see the white perfection pass?

I look about. I am alone.
Yet, I am not alone.
She has come at last.

Do you think she used my living eyes to see?
Or, was it through hers,
I saw?

Never was the tree so beautiful before.

I Met Him

I met him when the day was hottest
On a dusty road that stretched
Interminably ahead.

His wind-tossed shock of yellow hair
Was matted with the heat,
His blouse open at the throat
As though he needed room to breathe,
Across his face a streak
Where careless hand
Had brushed away the moisture.

He smiled.
It is an adventure to meet Peter
When he smiles.

Of a sudden, there was no dusty road.
There were leafy woods, a trickling stream,
Flickering sunlight on grey trunks of trees,
Songs of birds, and soft green moss to walk on.

I see friendliness in his clear, brown eyes,
Hint of depths and tendernesses,
Of reserves and subtle understandings,
And the mocking light of laughter.

In all the world are only pleasant things
When Peter smiles.

A Chance Word

A chance word,
A cruel word,
Spoken in jest
Yet spoken to hurt,
Struck its mark
And killed my joy,
My little, evanescent joy.

A rude hand placed
On a butterfly's wing,
Bruised and crushed
The delicate thing.

Strong and powerful one,
Do you like to hurt
Evanescent things
Like butterflies' wings,
And my little joy?

Once I Planted a Lily

Once I planted a lily
Where all who passed could see.
I loved it and tended it
And from it came other lilies.

They grew straight and tall.
And all who passed
Stopped to marvel at their beauty.

One day I heard voices.
I lingered where I stood
Until they sounded far away.

Then I went down the path
To the little stream
Where they leaned their flaming heads
Against the footbridge.

I wished to thank them
For their fragrance,
And their glowing color,
And the pleasure that they gave.

Where they had stood
Tall and fair,
I found bleeding stems
And torn petals.

Those who had come
Were those who see in beauty
Only something to destroy.

Sometimes,
It is love they touch.

He Came to Me Confidently

He came to me confidently wagging his tail.
I was thinking of something else
And did not pat him.

He turned away. Then he came back
And gave my hand a dry little lick
Just to say he was sorry he had seemed to mind.

My hand hung inert at my side.
He looked at me with questioning eyes.
Then he went away. I remember now.

I remember, now that he is not here for me to pat.
A dog's eyes can say so much.
I wish I had patted him that day.

Did Your Mother Call You

Did your mother call you, little girl?
And did you leave your playhouse
And go at once?

Things are scattered about
That I know you did not wish to leave.
Your doll there by a tree,
Your apple and your orange,
Your tea set and your blocks.

Your doll's face is stained
As though your tears had fallen on it.
Her clothes are torn,
And from a wound in her side
Sawdust streams.
Your tree-trunk table has a cover laid
As though you meant to have a feast.

When the call comes at the end, little girl,
Will you leave, I wonder,
A doll sorely wounded
And a table set for a feast?

Three Angry Wasps

Three angry wasps facing me,
Their wings outspread,
Their bodies working,
Intense, alert
For my next move.

I do not make it.
It is not worth while
Even for the sake of a garden wall
To brave the stings of three angry wasps.

Their home left undisturbed
Will grow apace.
Many wasps will soon
Contest the spot with me.

I could burn them out,
Or force them out
With noxious smelling stuff.

But after all they found the place
Where I let the stones fall down,
A niche just right for them.
They worked hard to lay a good foundation.

Wouldn't you fight for your home?
Under the circumstances
Wouldn't you feel
That you deserved to win?

Last Night

Last night a little mouse came
And gnawed and gnawed.
He made only the faintest scratching sound,
But I could not sleep.

A little thing like the gnawing of a mouse
Kept me awake.

What of the people on Third Avenue
Who sleep, if they sleep,
In face of the crashing elevated?

What of the soldiers in the trenches
Who hear always the roar of cannon
And exploding shells?

A Poem Was Singing Itself

A poem was singing itself in my head
When I came upon a dead mouse that maggots were eating.

The poem stopped singing.
Afterwards I could not write it down.

So when life seems fairest and beauty lies ahead
Dead things are in the way.

And feeding upon them are maggots of Pride and Greed
And Jealousy and Gossip and Strife and Ambition.

I Should Like to Keep This Dainty for You

I should like to keep this dainty for you, little
mouse.
It would give me pleasure to vary
Your meagre diet so luxuriously.
It is exactly what you like.
I could place it attractively
Where your inquisitive black eyes
And your sensitive nose would find it.

But you would not understand
That it is only you I like,
Your quiet little way,
Your sleek, grey coat,
Your dainty appetite.

I have so much that I throw away.
It takes so little for you to live.
It seems a pity—

But if I did this for you,
With your Rooseveltian idea of the family,
And your loyalty to other mice,
There would be so many of you in a few weeks
That I would have to move away
And leave you in possession of my little house.

I don't like you well enough for that, little mouse.
So, here goes your titbit.

Sixth Avenue

Sixth Avenue on a murky afternoon.
The elevated crashes overhead.
A flat-wheeled surface car
Shrieks its way toward Fifty-ninth street.
There is rain in the air and gloom.

At Fiftieth street the conductor shouts
"All out. Last stop."

You descend to the grimy street to wait.
Six cars come in quick succession.
You regard each one hopefully.

Three disgorge their freight
At the conductor's cry "All out!"
Three turn off at Fifty-third street.

Ten minutes pass and no car comes.
You decide not to wait
And pick your way to the sidewalk.

Just above, passage is blocked
By a building in process of renovation.

Again you pick your way,
Around piles of boards and brick and lime,
To the street's center.

There a boy works in a sewer.
He sits on the rim of an open man-hole,
Dangling feet and legs in its yawning mouth.

Beside him, filled with clear, cool water,
Stands an old tin can
Holding an Easter lily.

The lily, untouched by its surroundings,
Lifts its lovely head
To the street's ugliness.

The clouds part.
Through the rift sunshine comes
And illumines them.

Afterwards, you remember
The whiteness of the lily
And the boy's face.

So always,
The world's sordidness,
And the world's beauty.

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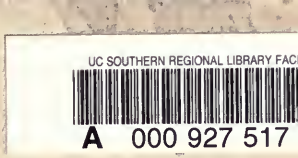

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